IN THE
DELIRIUM
OF THE
SIMULATION:
Baudrillard Revisited

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SIMULATION ONE

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As we get closer to the release of our latest book *In the Delirium of the Simulation: Baudrillard Revisited*, we are able to start disseminating the material, beginning with this longer excerpt from Chapter 2 (A Metabox of Terms), entitled *Simulation One*. We have received the test prints and the book is now fully in production, ready for release in a few weeks. So what is a simulation? and how can it be delirious?

The Latin origin of the term "*simulatio*" refers to hypocrisy, disguise or even deception, even appearance. You first have to pretend in order to simulate. You can't plunge headlong into simulation. When you finally end up simulating, you forget that you are simulating.

Simulation refers further to the concept of modelling, to which Baudrillard refers in part. In the field of modelling, complex dynamic systems are simulated today with the use of digital computer systems in science, making use of models where complexity-reduction takes place in order to obtain data about the modelled system (weather forecasts, for example), and then proceeding to make an approximation of reality. In other words, data is simulated here in order to achieve a durable gain from disorder, volatility and noise. Baudrillard, initially a more classical media theorist, who was particularly interested in television and video (and only later in the computer), radicalises the concept of simulation and turns it into the immanent process concept of an operationalised, "self-referential", and increasingly totalising system. On the one hand, his theory touches on the relationship between "*Wirklichkeit"* and "reality", and on the other, it directly

addresses the relationship between reality and hyperreality, which is already mediated by the media.

Baudrillard's distance from traditional metaphysics becomes clear through his famous thesis in his book *Simulation and Simulacra,* which states that the principle of reality (both a separation *and* a relationship between the imaginary and the real) increasingly disappears, or at least is transformed by simulation, while artificial realities are constantly generated anew by simulation (Baudrillard, 1994: 13). Both illusions and computer modelling inherit the principle of reality; with regard to the former, the *simulator* asserts a state that could actually exist but does not (i.e. it merely gives the appearance of existing), while *modelling* is supposed to contain a prediction of real existing facts. Computer simulations use very specific rules to generate models that can be regarded as operational approximations of reality. Operations are to be understood here as simulating computer-aided processes that carry out transformations on the basis of inputs and generate new realities as outputs. Computer simulations, at the least, create something similar to the same, whereby the computer, as a medium, opens up virtual realities by means of its immersive power and programmed logic, which are not only to be understood as model worlds, but with Baudrillard these simulations can be understood as instances that are not only to be understood as approximations to reality, but generate new artificial realities. This does not lead to a duplication of the world, but only to an approximation of it by means of algorithmic processes, which can also open up new artificial realities and horizons of knowledge, especially in the social sphere. In contrast to the negative aspect of deception, computer simulations are about the positive aspect of simulation, where the aim is to model real processes and entities (performatively) in order to find out something about their behaviour and also to test theories. On the basis of a vast amount of data and specific models, the use of algorithms produces digital events that always have to be interpreted. Computer simulations do not produce

truths, but statistical knowledge characterised by varying degrees of uncertainty. Computer models are essentially equations designed to simulate the interaction of different processes. Such models can only be run on expensive supercomputers, and it can take days to produce the forecasts. However, increasing or decreasing the complexity of the models does not answer the fundamental question of how to calculate anything at all when there are both many known unknowns and unknown unknowns. Even simple models can contain fifteen or twenty uncertain parameters. The standard approach for dealing with multiple uncertain parameters is *Monte Carlo simulation*,where the model is programmed to run many times, each time randomly drawing a value from the selection of individual parameters. In a random draw, we can assume that the more likely a value is to be drawn, the more often it will be drawn, so the results reflect the relative probability of the parameter values. The problem with this is that it is not just the range of parameter values that are uncertain, but also the *shape* of many data collections are unknown. It becomes problematic when we have strong evidence that a parameter is not normally distributed. If you run a model hundreds or thousands of times with data collections that make it very unlikely that extreme values will be recorded, the results will probably suggest that we can worry less about catastrophic futures. However, if our parameter selection tells us that extreme outcomes are much more likely, and the likelihood of ecological catastrophe is not necessarily unlikely, then the models would tell us to take them much more seriously.

Deception and modelling refer both to a reality and to potential difference. While deception attempts to conceal the difference that contrasts reality, the computer simulation/model is intended to approximate reality (although never achieving it). Baudrillard, on the other hand, assumes that today's systems dissolve the dichotomy between reality and simulative functionality in the course of their simulation capacities, whereas in computer simulations, on the other hand, only

the functionally relevant aspects are generated and approximated to reality. However, one must always bear in mind that reality itself already has fictional components, irrespective of the reality conveyed by the media. Thus, at least the reality principle is transformed and replaced by the simulation principle, insofar as an interaction, indeed an interplay of reality and model can now be established with regard to the simulation. Reality is generated as mediated by the media in a grandiose, beguiling, narcotic and at the same time euphoric excess. In this context, Baudrillard mentions a malingerer who not only feigns an illness, but actually develops symptoms of the illness. As it is no longer possible to objectively determine whether the malingerer is really ill or not, medicine is no longer effective, as it can only treat illnesses that are true on the basis of objective facts. Baudrillard transfers this example somewhat dubiously to the system as a de-structured whole. Because reality, as it continues to take place in an eventful way, is now taken for reality itself, for example in the TV news, life today takes place primarily in fictional space.

The difference between simulation and reality now seems to be abolished insofar as the simulation is realised as reality and reality is realised as simulation (Baudrillard, 2005). The system has entered its "fatale" phase, which Baudrillard also calls an "integral reality", a seamless surface without cracks, a complete transparency that breaks through no opposition and knows no break or entry point. Identity and difference are no longer opposed to each other, but are reformulated in a simulated form into a diversification of identity. The spectre of differentiation is an iteration of the same. This productivism consists in the production of the *more* and the *over*, which operates the same as an inflationary and accelerated movement of an idealised relativism, an immanence as a mode of exaggeration: simulation produces reality.

Models precede reality and constitute it by informing the latter. If causality is to

be regarded as immanent, then this immanence has become truly integral to the extent that cause and effect are actually fully encoded. Not that contingency is completely ruled out, but even the unpredictability causality (Fuchs) conceived in systems theory, which speaks of small causes and large or even unpredictable effects, negotiates differentiated operations and events under the dictum of connections that keep the system stable, albeit always shifted. But the problem of causality insists in a peculiar way: in a scheme of causality, A affects B, and B affects A. A and B both act on each other and on a third product that then respectively acts upon and reacts to A and B.

Baudrillard's simulation hypothesis also states that the metaphysical statement about the boundary that separates reality as essence from reality as appearance through all mediations becomes obsolete through simulation. Simulation drives systems to make themselves appear. They make the difference appear as a phenomenon that eludes conclusive observation, that demands presence. Even the appearance of difference always comes too late, insofar as every presence is postponed and defined by connecting operations. Luhmann's statement that there is nothing behind it, no being behind the appearances, should be interjected here. The perverse figure of the undecidability of reality and simulation short-circuits the dialectic of the classical metaphysics of reality/being and appearance. Moreover, simulations cannot fail because they always generate a new reality instead of failing because of the old reality, insofar as they always deliver new results as a consequence of their operational processes. Simulations depend on the codes and models used and do not deliver absolute truths, but statistical knowledge with changing variables of certainty: "Instead of first principles, operational realities, instead of theoretical representation, simulative world generation" (Dippel & Warnke, 2022: 32).

The undecidable fluxion of the images and signs controlled by the code, which

Baudrillard sees circulating in accelerated acceleration and in pure and at the same time differential self-reference (including external reference), refers to the anti-mimetic character of the concept of simulation, which also characterises simulation as the "divine referentiality of images" (Baudrillard, 1978b: 16). The images and signs, which here are always those of the code, are now their own pre-images, which in turn precede reality in the form of a "precession of the simulacra" (Baudrillard, 2005: 13). This means, on the one hand, that they become more important than material reality and, on the other hand, that they are part of a medially mediated reality, whereby the connection between these two realities would have to be clarified. Both the logical and the temporal relationship between image/sign and reality has now been reversed: "What must be radically called into question is the principle of the image's reference, that strategic ruse with which it repeatedly creates the appearance of referring to a real world, to real objects, of reproducing something that is logically and chronologically prior to it. None of this is true. Rather, as a simulacrum, the image precedes the real insofar as it reverses the logical, the causal sequence of the real and reproduction" (Baudrillard, 1986: 265). The medium is now the all-important centre through which the technical means structure the possible ends (Röttgers, 2021:19).

Free-floating, in an endless cycle, the images and signs have little connection with an outside, but in their immanent empty circulation merely refer to further signs and images, or, to put it another way, they no longer draw primarily from *real* reality/actuality, but are a result of the automatism of the (digital) code that endlessly generates and reproduces them. This is not about the derealisation of the object, the transition from its material existence to the sign, but about the fact that the objects correspond to the order of the signs through which they are partly constructed and programmed. At the same time, we are now plagued by the idea of *pure functionality*. From now on, in addition to their trivial functions, which make them compatible for certain needs (in order ... to), objects must recognise

their commutability or interchangeability as signs, that is, their functionality (as ongoing problem construction in the technical milieu), or they no longer have any function at all. The individualisation of technical objects, which as relations in their genesis are now also to be considered independently of human knowledge, concerns their function, while in addition, with Simondon for example, the individuation of the technical objects must also be considered, as the emergence and dissolution of tensions in the technical milieus, which lead to a metastable equilibrium being achieved, manifests itself as a phase change. Individuation requires energetic, material and informational conditions, which are to be understood as constitutive relations that enter into the existence of the constituted objects. While for Simondon the techno-sphere still consists mainly of machines and operators, today we are dealing with information systems that are composed of many networks of objects and users. Databases, algorithms and network protocols now belong to the associated milieus of digital objects (Simondon, 2012). Since these are always also a set of logical statements, their mutual causality is highly extensible and controllable. In its growth, the techno-sphere or techno-city organises itself as a self-reproductive system and as a closed world, and this process increasingly eliminates non-technical factors. The relationships of network environments are saturated or even flooded with various non-closed technological object cultures; they are characterised by hyper-connectivity along with an explosive increase in complexity. Under these technological conditions, actors today exist in a broadband world in which they are permanently connected to and embedded in various technological milieus; objects that communicate, in part, automatically, and now even largely bypass the subjects.

The system suffers deliriously and *hypertrophically* from the ecstasy of the same: more and more of the same of the same circulates (through all differences), that is, in the simulative maelstrom of circulation, the signs/images/models have lost

all (underlying) reference – signs/images/models only refer to further signs/images. In this "frenzy of self-reference" (Baudrillard, 1986: 268), the signs/images are no longer bound to the consciousness or intention of any subjects, but have become autonomous in relation to them. But couldn't the frenzy of self-reference also be thought of as an unstable difference (of system and environment), so that the system is practically nothing and not a being; in the maelstrom of co-productions and co-simulations there is no here or there.

In this context, Baudrillard also speaks of a "*hypertelia*" (Baudrillard, 1991: 13) of signs, an overshooting of signs beyond their original telos. The signs/images thus circulate ecstatically, self-referentially and without reference to an external reality, according to the alleged diagnosis of simulation theory. However, this needs to be specified, as we shall see. Baudrillard uses the term *hypertelia* here differently from Simondon, for whom it denotes functional over-adaptation, the overdetermination of technical objects to a single function. For Simondon, hypertelic technical objects are closed objects that are not oriented towards being continued, completed, perfected or extended.

At the very least, it should be said here that with regard to the concept of reference, the figure "on …" should be clarified. For the systems theorist Luhmann, this reference of something to something is bound to the scheme of distinction and designation. For him, the operation of reference is the process of designating something within the framework of a difference or distinction thus established. If, with Baudrillard, we can speak of the self-reference of the system, then we can assume that the system realises itself exclusively by means of its own operativity, and that the reference to what it is not, i.e. the external reference, is only ever established within the framework of its own operativity. But can the reference to others ever be excluded? It is apparent that even with Hegel this can be denied, insofar as self-reference is always already unfolded through external reference.

What Luhmann then calls the basic self-referentiality of the system is the recursive insurance in operations that reproduce it integrated in networks of further operations, independent of specific external reference and its themes, but without ever being able to eliminate this external reference per se. However, the system has no need to sharpen the external reference, and if something emerges that the system is not, then integration and inclusion are ordered without further ado. Systems theory distinguishes the operation of reference, in which one side is neglected in the course of differentiation, from the operation of observation, in which both sides are taken into consideration. In this context, Peter Fuchs speaks of swarms to illustrate that the observation of communication targets and exploits underlying distinctions for integrating information processing, whereby swarm systems are still able to observe the operations of observation (Fuchs, 2023: 52). However, this need not, as Fuchs favours, lead to systems that operationally produce contingency, but can certainly also lead to simulative systems in Baudrillard's sense, which stage endless proliferations of distinctions or differences, only in order to be able to guarantee the connectivity of systemically relevant operations of communication despite all modulation and the possibility of playing on differences over time. With regard to the distinction between system and environment, Fuchs speaks of a difference that is nothing, or at least knows no here or there, but does not completely cancel out reference. Even systems theory then treats contingency as a question of connection within the framework of a difference of "before/after" (this, and then that, and then…; and this as repetition, without marking a beginning or an end) in order for the system to create the stability of a self (the simultaneity of the system in every actuality). In the end, the swarms are fixed by the selective operations, namely by operations that the system ascribes to itself in the course of its ecstatic proliferation and that it stages. It can therefore utilise or even generate a non-excludable fantasy of stratagems in order to keep the system itself running, in the sense of simulative ecstasy. But what are we to make of Baudrillard's talk of systems of referenceless

images in the context of simulation?

Quantum theory has known about referencelessness since the quantum electrodynamics of Feynman. This pragmatically oriented physical theory is to be understood here neither as a representation nor as the result of mathematical consistency. The ontological indeterminacy here follows from the lack of reference, insofar as the diagrammatic views of Feynman's theory do not refer to empirically detectable electrons and photons that follow several paths simultaneously. Nevertheless, the diagrammatics is to be understood as a highly abstract, and at the same time descriptive theory, that leads to empirically verifiable results that prove the operational pragmatism of the model. No one has ever seen quantum objects or wave functions (we ride on waves of nothing), but if one were to follow Baudrillard, they take on the character of reality via simulations. As with quantum-theoretical molecules, the constant use of simulations indicates the levelling of model and reality, copy and original, and map and territory. Baudrillard at least suspects that every reference to the world could mean the *necrotisation* of this reference. If the reference does not really exist, then the idea of the reference continues to exist in the state of the phantom, the puppet or as a simulation. The liquidation of referentials goes hand in hand with their artificial resurrection in the sign systems.

But what does levelling really mean? If neither the territory precedes the map nor the map precedes the territory—i.e. both are to be negated and thus the difference has also disappeared—then neither pole can be separated from the other; there is a kind of collapse of the two poles into one another or an absorption of positive and negative charge. This state of simulation, which has overcome the poles as existent and non-existent, is initially still described in terms of what is not. In order to articulate the collapse of the distinction between positive and negative, the simulation must be developed through a vocabulary of

paradox and postponement. It is about a kind of ineffability when Baudrillard writes of simulation as a third order, beyond true and false, beyond equivalences and beyond rational distinctions. The beyond suggests that Baudrillard's articulation of simulation eludes the conditions of expression. One could also call this the modulus in Baudrillard. In mathematics, the modulus describes the absolute value of a term, regardless of whether it is positive or negative: for example, the modulus of the negative twelve and the positive twelve is twelve. You are beyond the truth, because the negative value of the thought is equivalent to its positive value.

In Deleuze's work, the problem of reference is thematised and refined with the term *inclusive disjunction*. It is a process that relates foreign, or even hostile entities, to one another without them having to share a common "logic" with regard to the negotiated object. The form of inclusive disjunction implies that the exclusive—*Or*—is not transformed into the purely inclusive and additive—*And*—but nevertheless into—*And Or* In a medial theory of tertiarity, the third party is used as a messenger who transmits a message between two absentees beyond the sender and receiver (Fischer, 2022: 268). With the third party as a medium, reference is already made to network-like information architectures. The messenger cultivates contingency, he can mediate, but he can also be neutral or engage. As a mediator, the messenger standardises sender and receiver and establishes connectivity, but as a manipulator and instigator of conflict, he can also interrupt, or even prevent, connections. As a constitutive scapegoat, he can then be switched off. As an interpreter, be it as a commentator, entertainer or journalist, he not only embodies the function of the messenger, but is also a functional definition of the technically supported medium. It is the medium in its operationality that interposes messages between absentees: its characteristic of a loose coupling of messages is brought into an extremely tricky form with the simulation, which still exceeds or evades any third party. This is what is meant by

functional definition in the sense of the constitution of a technically supported problem complex.

Baudrillard also wants to distinguish himself from the neo-Marxist critique of ideology as "ideology merely corresponds to a misappropriation of reality through signs; simulation corresponds to a short-circuiting of reality and its duplication through signs. The finality of ideological analysis always and only consists in restituting the objective process, and one imagines a false problem if one wants to restitute the truth behind the simulacra" (Baudrillard, 1978b: 43 f.). It is therefore only logical that Samuel Strehle, for example, writes that, for Baudrillard, the truth behind the simulacra has been lost because simulation and reality have long since become indistinguishable (Strehle, 2011: 105). Mirage, image and model seem to coincide indistinguishably with reality in the simulation, whereupon Baudrillard has earned himself the accusation that this mixture is itself a fallacy, because it is based on the thesis that there must have been a non-fictional reality before the simulation, which would then have been doubled or absorbed by the fiction, but in reality reality itself is rather unrealistic and always filled with the imaginary. However, Baudrillard, perhaps even indebted here to Deleuze, who, in the wake of Klossowski, emphasises the primacy of the mirage/simulacrum over image and archetype, is not at all concerned with assuming a real world behind the mirages, which is non-fictional, but rather with showing that the separation of the world of life and the worlds of signs and images has become problematic, insofar as the former has increasingly become one of coded and model-like signs and images: "all are oriented towards their respective delusions of identification with guiding models and provided models of simulation" (Baudrillard, 1978a: 22). Baudrillard has a tendency to equate simulation and simulacrum. For Deleuze, simulacra, unlike a simulation, make up the world. Simulacra are not copies in this respect, they have their own positive power and can produce the world without reference to a model.

Baudrillard often uses metaphors from physics to trace the definition of model and reality, such as the "implosion of antagonistic poles" (Baudrillard, 1978b: 31), the "short-circuit" between reality and model (Baudrillard, 1986: 266) or the famous "Möbius strip" (Baudrillard, 1976: 63), on which reality and model circulate inseparably, but can also annihilate each other in an "uninterrupted circuit without reference" (Baudrillard, 1978b: 14), a "spinning of images" (Baudrillard, 1986: 268). The Möbius strip closely follows the dialectic, because the front side becomes the back side without further ado, just as the negative becomes the positive without further ado. The inside leads to the outside and vice-versa. You can cut the ribbon on the centre line as often as you like, the tangled topology does not change; Baudrillard calls this transference. Another way to put it is that the "exo-world", as reality, can only be explored from the "endo-world" as a model; yet, the cuts created by each modelling process then reappear in the "exo-world".

In any case, the short-circuiting of the difference between model and reality leads to the "agony of the real and the rational" (Baudrillard, 1978: 50), or to that delirium of indifference in which even the distinction between 'true' and 'false' appears as an antiquated discourse. Thus, the divine referentiality of the images is also to be understood as a rejection of the principle of representing the real through the image and sign. However, one should always bare in mind that Baudrillard's statement about the integration of reality into the hyperreality of simulation is not aimed at the disappearance of reality and material reality—the world of things outside of signs—but at the dissolution of the principle of reality, and the metaphysical idea of a completely recognisable reality. Baudrillard writes: "to say that reality has disappeared is not to say that it has disappeared in a physical sense, but rather in a metaphysical sense. Reality continues to exist; it is its principle that is dead" (Baudrillard, 2006: 14).

Georg Tholen does not seem to agree with this either, writing, quite misleadingly, about Baudrillard: "since Baudrillard's agony of the real, this approach has only ever led to infinite regress: the hyperreal causes reality to disappear, what was once present (the proletariat, the subject or history) is now absent, what was previously or absolutely absent is now threateningly present. But what then – according to the first immanent objection – is the reality of this hyperreality, which must be recognised as having the real and effective capacity to dissolve the former reality?" (Tholen, 2022: 5). The hyper-reality, as the first answer might now be, is, among other things, that of allowing the subject to live on as a simulacrum; secondly, what was once present does not disappear, it lives on and arises again in a thousand simulacra. When the imageless God is dead, only then can he proliferate in x-fold images. Beyond the images, we can now also speak of *visiotypes*, world views that call up certain models that have a symbolic content for the consumer (Metz & Seeßlen, 2011: 14).

Moreover, can we also not say that we will come back to the fact that the real as the boundary of the system has not disappeared at all, while reality is constantly being translated into hyperreality and/or generated in and with it? It is therefore also necessary to distinguish between the real and reality. Simulation is not about similarities, imitations or the reproduction of the (first) real, which continues to exist as a boundary, but about the generation and production of reality in hyperreality, about the second, the integrative real, which today is more real than the real. What disappears is merely the principle of reality, which is based on the difference between fiction and reality.

Despite the differentiations proposed up to this point with regard to the concepts of hyperreality, reality and the real, Baudrillard often seems to be merely doubling the cultural-critical discourse of doubling: "thus we all live in a universe that resembles the original one in a strange way—things are doubled in it by their own

scenario" (Baudrillard, 1978b: 23). In his critique of Baudrillard, Tholen also jumps straight to the doubling thesis. Baudrillard's allegedly anthropological discourse refers to the doubling effects of the real through the imaginary, and is based on a system of place values with two ultimately inseparable poles. According to a doubling, similarity or even correspondence, there is the endeavour of the real (or the simulation) to make one (out of something), which is the imaginary (Tholen, 2022: 54). For Tholen, doubling is based on the dispositive of the mirror game, which, because of the sameness, repeatedly produces identifications that are in turn duplicates of themselves. The imaginary assimilation allows two dimensions to merge into one. There is no third, Tholen concludes. We will come back to this, for now however, it should be noted that Baudrillard assigns the mirror and its duplications as a metaphor in reference to Lacan's lost mirror stage as belonging to a different epoch than the epoch of simulation. Baudrillard writes that truth is no longer the reflexive truth of the mirror, but the manipulative truth of the test that tests and questions, of the laser that probes and cuts, of the matrices that store your perforated sequences, of the genetic code that controls your combinations, of the cells that inform your sensory universe, and so on. It is therefore no longer about the duplication of the real/reality in the imaginary, but about the transformation, generation and new construction of reality in and through the simulation, and it is precisely this hyper-reality that appears particularly real because it already contains, among other things, the principles of perception and actions as construction factors of reality as well as the construction methods of the models themselves. The space-time continuum of the simulation is not constituted by Euclidean geometry, but by the internal conditions of the construction and perception of the simulative models and the code.

Baudrillard's aim is to open up a new field of knowledge about other ways of challenging simulation, or, to put it another way, to gain the latest insights into

how the state of hyperreality can be challenged and changed. For Baudrillard, the *apodictic* statement that "everything is simulation" (which is rather to be understood as a tendency) is to be understood as a challenge to the system in order to arrive at the questions of where and how exactly the system of virtuality, in its common manifestations, can be challenged. Baudrillard is of the opinion that one can only theorise about social change if one first acknowledges the simulation in order to then twist it and overcome it. Those who insist on having to defend "natural reality" against virtual or post-human situations and realities cannot reach this point of questioning the system, indeed they cannot reach the plateau from which they could see the new perspectives of resistance.

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